



January 7, 2005

NEAT is an independent, citywide association working to support public education in Saint Paul.

Re: The Achievement Gap in Saint Paul

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Dear Principals and Parent Group/Site Council Chairs:

The Achievement Gap is a big deal. It is a national problem reflected throughout Minnesota and here in Saint Paul. It will take the combined efforts of parents, educators, community members, and local nonprofits and business to get it closed.

NEAT hosted a forum on the Achievement Gap in Saint Paul in November to help broaden our understanding of the local issues. This report presents the findings from our investigation. The conclusion of this report contains recommendations for individual parents and parent groups, and identifies systemic issues that can be worked on at a broader level through the infrastructure provided by NEAT.

Our hope is that parents groups, site councils and principals will use this report to guide school-based efforts. Please make copies of this report for the members of your parent group(s) and site council and schedule time on an upcoming agenda to discuss how you see the indicators playing out in your school.

When you see systemic issues echoed in your own experience, please contact NEAT. By combining our efforts, the parents of Saint Paul can make a substantive contribution to closing the Achievement Gap.

Your voice can make a difference.

Sincerely,

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**Working to Support a
Premiere Education For All**

November 15, 2004

The Achievement Gap in Saint Paul

What is it?

Where is it?

What can we do about it?

ABSTRACT – November 15, 2004 NEAT hosted a public forum on the Achievement Gap in Saint Paul. This report recaps the information and data presented at the forum for school and community groups to consider in their efforts to support public education in Saint Paul.



NEAT
St. Paul Network of Education Action Teams

November 2004
www.stpaulneat.org



Introduction

NEAT began a journey last spring that involved over 30 people in an Action Planning conversation about “What could / should a citywide parent association be doing?” which set two key priorities:

- **Engaging Parents** – Take a bigger role in engaging parents in their roles and responsibilities in supporting student achievement. Find ways to connect with unengaged parents and improve student-teacher-parent communications
- **Diversity & Language Barriers** – Engage parents in community-based efforts to reduce the Achievement Gap and find ways to address the structural barriers for our non-English speaking parents

This fall, NEAT hosted two public forums to support these efforts. The September *EMBRACING DIVERSITY* forum and the November event, “The Achievement Gap in Saint Paul.” The Embracing Diversity Report was distributed in late October.

Saint Paul Public Schools is making progress toward closing the Achievement Gap as demonstrated by gains in student achievement. At the same time, we see the district struggling with the same issues playing out at the state level.

Both the district and the Minnesota Department of Education are making genuine efforts to report student achievement data; however, both have a long way to go in helping people find meaning in the data. They can show us tables, charts and graphs until we’re blue in the face, but it won’t do us any good – we won’t be able to be full participants in working toward the solutions – until we understand what it all means.

The central struggle is to “find meaning in the data” in a way that answers two fundamental questions: “How do we use the data to improve student achievement?” and “How do we know that what we’re spending the money on is working?” We see the district using the data to improve student achievement (otherwise they wouldn’t be making gains), but the “meaning” of the data, the interpretative steps of “What does the data show?” and “What are we going to do about it?” aren’t readily accessible to parents and the public. What’s more, thus far any public conversations about “What are we going to do about it?” have been limited to school-based reform.

This investigation into the data includes both school-based and community-based variables that contribute to the Achievement Gap and demonstrates the importance of basing reform efforts on what the data shows about both.

Children’s Defense Fund of Minnesota is the “go to” place for information about children’s well-being in Minnesota (www.cdf-mn.org). They produce a newsletter that we urge everyone to subscribe to. In addition, NEAT is in the process of reframing the “Use the Data” portion of its Web site to include both. The data provided in this report will be updated at our Web site as we find new and better sources of information.

Background & Demographics

Monday, November 15, 2004 NEAT hosted a public conversation about the Achievement Gap in Saint Paul. The event was attended by 30 parents and community members from 22 Saint Paul schools and 2 community agencies. 3 attendees were individual community members with no children in the schools; 1 affiliation was unknown. Schools represented were:

Elementaries

Adams Spanish Immersion
Battle Creek
Crossroads Arts & Science/Montessori
Expo for Excellence
Four Seasons A+
French Immersion
Hope Academy
Jackson Preparatory Magnet School
JJ Hill Montessori
Museum Magnet
North End
Open School (K-12)
Riverview West Side School of Excellence

Secondary

Humboldt Junior High
Murray Junior High
Ramsey Junior High

Area Learning Center
Central High School
Como Park Senior High
Harding High School
Highland Park Senior High
Johnson High School

Also in attendance were 1 state senator, 2 members of the Minnesota House of Representatives and 2 members of the Saint Paul Board of Education.

Framework

Four speakers were invited to speak to three questions:

What is it? Yusef Mgeni, Saint Paul Public Schools Office of Educational Equity

Where is it?

- District data Tom Watkins, Saint Paul Public Schools, Research, Evaluation & Assessment
- Community data Jim Scheibel, Ramsey Action Programs, Inc.*

What can we do about it? Carlos Mariani, Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc.

* Jim Scheibel was unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict; Jennifer Armstrong from NEAT delivered the community-based data.

An effort was made to answer the second question, "Where is it?" using indicators provided in the October 2003 study *Parsing the Achievement Gap: Baselines for Tracking Progress*, published by Educational Testing Service (available at www.ets.org/research/pic/parsing.pdf). The study identifies 14 correlates of student achievement:

Correlates of Student Achievement

School Based (6)

- Rigor of Curriculum
- Teacher Preparation
- Teacher Experience and Attendance
- Class Size
- Technology-Assisted Instruction
- School Safety

Before and Beyond School (8)

- Parent Participation
- Student Mobility
- Birthweight
- Lead Poisoning
- Hunger and Nutrition
- Reading to Young Children
- Television Watching
- Parent Availability

The intent of the forum was to use the data as a starting point for discussion about how Saint Paul is doing on these variables.

Part 1. What is it?

Yusef Mgeni, Saint Paul Public Schools Office of Educational Equity, spoke to the need to have high expectations for all students as determined by global expectations, and not to aspire to mediocrity as determined by the Minnesota Basic Skills Test. He referred to research demonstrating that a *teacher's belief* in the ability of a student to succeed is more highly correlated with increased achievement than a *child's own* self-perception about his or her ability to succeed.

Mgeni spoke to the need for clusters (or “posses”) of minority students to work together to reinforce high expectations and learning, and the need for school improvement efforts to go hand-in-hand with corresponding community supports. Mgeni is concerned that “Poverty and public education cannot be viewed as competing interests in public policy discussions.”

The approach you take to closing the Achievement Gap depends on how you define it – as academic achievement, as poverty, as future opportunities. Mgeni called for action in three areas: Respectful Relationships, Academic Rigor and High Expectations, and Reading, Reading, Reading.

Resources

Mgeni also mentioned two online resources for further investigation:

September/October 2004 - [Schools and the Achievement Gap: A Symposium](#), Commentaries on the proposition that school reform cannot succeed without major economic and social reform, Poverty & Race Research Action Council available at www.prrac.org/newsletters/sepoct2004.pdf

[Posted at [Get Connected](#) > [NEAT Connections Program](#) > [Cultural Communities](#) > [Additional Resources](#)]

And

[Rethinking Schools Online](#) available at www.rethinkingschools.org

Part 2. Where is it?

A. District data

The handouts provided by Tom Watkins, Saint Paul Public Schools, Research, Evaluation & Assessment are attached in Appendix A and are available online at:

Handout	URL (Either direct to the pdf or to the REA page where posted.)
District Achievement Summary (October 2004) - SPPS	rea.spps.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={E522F9DA-9E46-4760-AEF6-1D33A423E58E}
Comparing Apples to Apples, Grade 3 MCAs – SPPS	rea.spps.org/vertical/Sites/{E1D3F0E3-35E7-4DD7-B1FE-875A4D6825A8}/uploads/MCA_Grade_3_2000-2004_Apples_to_Apples_afriameri_rdg-math.pdf
Comparing Apples to Apples, Grade 5 MCAs – SPPS	rea.spps.org/vertical/Sites/{E1D3F0E3-35E7-4DD7-B1FE-875A4D6825A8}/uploads/MCA_Grade_5_2000-2004_Apples_to_Apples_afriameri_rdg-math.pdf
Comparing Apples to Apples, BSTs Grade 10 Reading and Grade 11 Math – SPPS	rea.spps.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={FE211722-565D-452C-9F8F-00B4F86E2806}
Pages 5-7 (pdf pages 6-8) of <i>Parsing the Achievement Gap</i>	www.ets.org/research/pic/parsing.pdf
A Summary of Tackling the Achievement Gap Head-On, Wilder Research Center.	Summary and full report are available at www.wilder.org/research/reports.html?summary=1227
* Both <i>Parsing the Achievement Gap</i> and the Wilder Report are posted at NEAT > About the Issues > Use the Data > Closing the Gap along with other interesting stuff.	

Watkins described how to read the reports and fielded questions about what the data showed. For example, “*If we’re showing such positive results on the SAT10s [District Achievement Summary (October 2004)] and MCAs [Apples to Apples], why do we see such poor results on the Grade 8 BSTs?*” Apparently that’s a difficult question to answer (although Jeff Koon pointed out the MCA kids are in the pipeline and he expects BST results to improve). The difficulty we had in both asking relevant questions and getting answers to them demonstrates the challenge we face in finding meaning in the data.

Information Provided by NEAT

In addition to the information provided by Watkins, NEAT presented highlights from information it had gathered on SOME of the School-Based Variables.

Notes:

1. NEAT did not attempt to collect data on all variables.
2. The brief recaps of the research and *WAYS TO MEASURE* are drawn directly from the *Parsing the Achievement Gap* study unless otherwise noted.
3. Due to time constraints, NEAT was only able to point to highlights from the following information at the event. This document contains the actual data and functioning links to the original sources.
4. NEAT is in the process of reframing the Use the Data portion of it’s Web site to provide space for updates as the conversation moves forward.

Rigor of Curriculum

Research shows that, “The more courses students take and the more challenging those courses, the more likely these students will be college ready and will persist to a college degree,” ACT Newsroom, October 2004.

www.act.org/news/releases/2004/10-14-04

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Disaggregated Percent of students that take one or more challenge courses.
- Disaggregated High School Graduates with Substantial Credits in Academic Courses
- Disaggregated Challenge Course Enrollment Data, All Core Courses v. 1-2 Courses

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Core Courses

SPPS launched the Project for Academic Excellence in 2002 to realign the curriculum with the new standards and increase the academic rigor of coursework. See www.thecenter.spps.org/pae High School Graduation requirements vary school-by-school.* For the Class of 2004, graduation requirements in the core subjects are:

Arlington Senior High	4 years of English and Social Studies; 3 years of Math and Science
Central High School	4 years of English; 3 years of Math, Science, Social Studies
Como Park Senior High	Guidance staff not available.**
Harding High School	4 years of English; 3 years of Math, Science, Social Studies
Highland Park Senior High	4 years of English and Social Studies; 2 years of Math; 1 year of Science
Humboldt High School	Guidance staff not available.**
Johnson High School	4 years of English and Social Studies; 2 years of Math and Science

* State mandated graduation requirements increase to 3 years of math and science beginning with the class of 2006.

** This is not the fault of the guidance staff! a) NEAT didn't think to attempt to collect this information until the last minute; and b) Minnesota Secondary Student/Guidance Counselor Ratios are 249:1 not 100:1 as recommended by the National Association for College Admission Counseling. See www.stpaulneat.org/Course and www.startribune.com/viewers/story.php?template=print_a&story=5096112

College Admissions

The University of Minnesota requires 4 years of English and 3 years of Math, Science and Social Studies, as well as 2 years of a single second language and 1 year of visual or performing arts.

See admissions.tc.umn.edu/AdmissionInfo/fresh_requirements.html#hsprep

Challenge Courses

SPPS offers a variety of challenging curriculum.

See gifted.spps.org/index.asp?SEC={10E7BA6F-626E-4C4B-AECC-FFC2648A5744}&Type=B_LIST#{ECD94930-3815-4159-8EA5-18AFDDC0929E}

At the high school level, these include AP, IB, Quest and post-secondary options. In its efforts to find disaggregated data related to challenge course enrollment, NEAT found only:

- District Advanced Placement (AP) Test Report 2004 – At rea.spps.org/vertical/Sites/{E1D3F0E3-35E7-4DD7-B1FE-875A4D6825A8}/uploads/2004_Final_Advanced_Placement_Summary_Report.pdf
- District ACT Report 2004 – At rea.spps.org/vertical/Sites/{E1D3F0E3-35E7-4DD7-B1FE-875A4D6825A8}/uploads/2004_Final_ACT_Summary_Report_11-2-2004.pdf

Teacher Preparation

Research shows that academic skills and knowledge of teachers make a difference in student achievement.

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Teacher certification in subjects taught
- Rates of out-of-field teaching

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Not addressed for the purposes of this event. Information about school staff characteristics can be found at <http://education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2004/>

Teacher Experience and Attendance

The research shows children taught by teachers with five years of experience make more progress in reading and math than do children taught by teachers with less than two years experience. However, the benefits of experience appear to level off after five years.

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Percentage of Fourth-Grade Students in Schools Where Same Teachers Started and Ended the Year
- Percentage of Twelfth-Grade Students Where 6 to 10 Percent of Teachers Are Absent on Average Day
- Percentage of Teachers with Three or Fewer Years of Experience

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Not addressed for the purposes of this event.

Class Size – Summary of Class Sizes, SPPS 2003-04

Research shows a correlation between student achievement and class size, especially in elementary. On a national scale there is concern about how the data shows minority and ELL students are enrolled in larger classes. The diversity of Saint Paul students suggests these concerns may not be locally relevant. Of greater local concern is class size at the secondary level.

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Percentage of Teachers with Classes of 25 or More Students by ethnicity, free/reduced lunch and ELL

The Achievement Gap in Saint Paul

November 15, 2004

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS*:

ELEMENTARY CLASS SIZES – 2003-04 school year - District Totals

Grade Level	Number of Students	Number of Classes	Average Class Size
Half-Day K'garten	829	45.5	18.2
All-Day K'garten	2508	118.0	21.3
Grade 1	2983	149.8	19.9
Grade 2	2906	140.8	20.6
Grade 3	2985	134.9	22.1
Grade 4	3053	132.7	23.0
Grade 5	3135	123.9	25.3
Grade 6	2972	119.4	24.9

* Information provided by Steve Schellenberg, SPPS REA. The Saint Paul Learns Data Center has a place for posting Class Size information, albeit empty. See datacenter.spps.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={6A3532BA-9E92-4DF4-B0A6-2436A22CF112};

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS SIZES – 2003-04 school year - District Totals

Subject	Number of Classes	Average Class Size	Classes over 35
English (regular)	260	24.7	16
English as a Second Language	139	14.7	0
Social Studies	198	25.3	7
Mathematics	241	24.6	11
Science	216	26.2	6
World Language	124	25.6	9
Physical Education/Health	121	28.0	17
Fine Arts	75	27.5	12
Family and Consumer Science	39	28.0	0
Industrial Technology	18	22.0	0
Performing Arts	78	27.9	15
Computer Technology and Applications	23	28.8	0
Other Regular Education	42	22.9	1
Special Education	298	7.7	0
District Totals (non-Special Education)	1573	24.8	94

SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS SIZES – 2003-04 school year - District Totals

Subject	Number of Classes	Average Class Size	Classes over 35
English (regular)	298	27.9	53
English as a Second Language	93	16.9	1
Social Studies	270	30.9	76
Mathematics	269	28.9	53
Science	239	30.4	61
World Language	138	27.7	19
Physical Education/Health	116	30.9	34
Fine Arts	69	28.4	3
Family and Consumer Science	63	28.8	9
Industrial Technology	54	23.6	4
Performing Arts	60	27.7	13
Computer Technology and Applications	43	23.5	0
Other Business Education	33	23.2	1
ROTC	24	25.7	8
Other Regular Education	67	20.7	5
Special Education	272	9.9	0
District Totals (non-Special Education)	1836	27.9	340

Technology-Assisted Instruction –

The jury is still out on the correlation between technology-assisted instruction and student achievement. “Research on the application of computers for developing higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving, group work, and hands-on learning activities, however, is less extensive and less conclusive.... The kinds of software available and its quality, the way computer instruction is integrated into curriculum to reflect state content standards, and the effectiveness of teachers in using what is available are largely unknown, in terms of national data. It is not just a matter of hardware and connections to the Internet; it is also the kinds of assignments that students are asked to do.”

Even so, *Parsing the Achievement Gap* limited its measures to issues around equity in access.

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Percentage of students in schools with computers available in classrooms
- Percentage of students in schools with computers with Internet in classroom
- Percentage of students assigned research using the Internet

All by ethnicity/income.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Not addressed for the purposes of this event. The Saint Paul Public Schools Technology Plan is available at connect.spps.org/Our_Technology_Plan

School Safety –

Research shows a direct link between a positive disciplinary climate and high achievement. Issues related to school safety include disruptive behavior in the classroom, student disrespect for teachers, absenteeism, tardiness, use of alcohol and controlled substances, fighting, fear of bullying or attack, gangs, and possession of firearms.

WAYS TO MEASURE:

Percentage of Students Ages 12 to 18 Who Report that in the Previous Six Months:

- That they avoided one or more places in school
- That street gangs were present in school
- That they feared an attack at school or on the way to school

Percentage of Students Ages 12 to 18 Reporting the Presence of Street Gangs at School, by Household Income

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Not addressed for the purposes of this event.

SPPS conducts School Safety Audits and is the recipient of a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education to coordinate with city, county and state emergency management agencies to improve safety in schools. The grant period runs from October 1, 2003 to April 1, 2005. More information is available at studentsupport.spps.org/index.asp?SEC={2AD1B803-573F-4C84-8E0A-79633035DE5C}&Type=B_BASIC and studentsupport.spps.org/index.asp?SEC={7B187FE1-AA3A-455C-9D57-C110A0A82446}&Type=B_BASIC

Note: It would be helpful to see what local information can be extracted from the Minnesota Student Survey to help answer these questions. 2004 Minnesota Student Survey - Findings scheduled to be available Fall 2004 are not yet posted; but can presumably be found in the near future at www.mnschoolhealth.com/resources.html?ac=data

The 2001 Findings for Ramsey County can be found at www.mnschoolhealth.com/article/data/030521150302-435650/031001162510-835808/fmsstablesramsey20co.pdf

Part 3. Community-Based Data – Variables Before and Beyond School (8)

Parent Participation

Research consistently shows a correlation between parent involvement and student achievement.

WAYS TO MEASURE

- Parent attended conferences
- Parent attended a school event
- Parent volunteered or served on committee
- Teachers reporting lack of parent involvement is moderate or serious problem

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Information may not be available districtwide. Some School SCIP Plans report parent participation data. See right sidebar at dataguide.spps.org

Student Mobility

The research shows “high student mobility has consequences for mobile students, teachers and schools. For students, the long-term effects of high mobility include lower achievement levels and slower academic pacing, culminating in a reduced likelihood of high school completions.”

WAYS TO MEASURE:

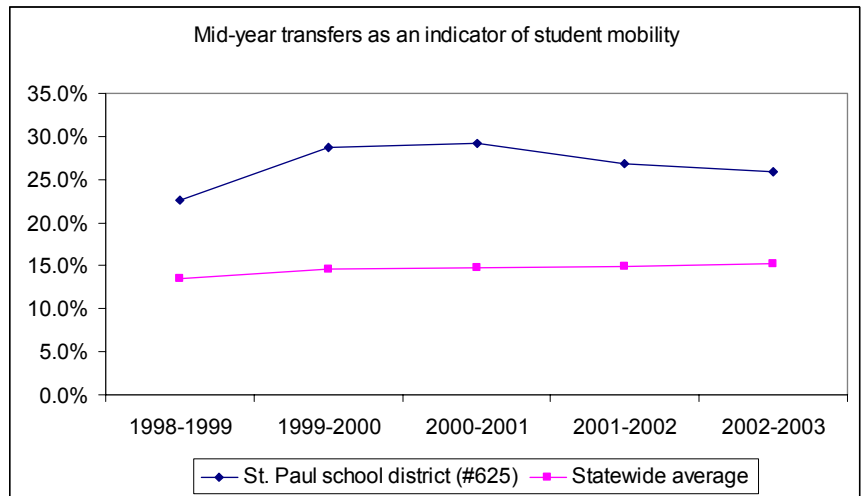
- Percentage of Third-Graders Who Changed Schools Three Times or More Since First Grade, by Race/Ethnicity and Income
- Additional variables related to mobility include race/ethnicity, income level, and renting v. home ownership.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

[Information provided by Wilder Research Center (highlights in bold)]

Student mobility & housing –

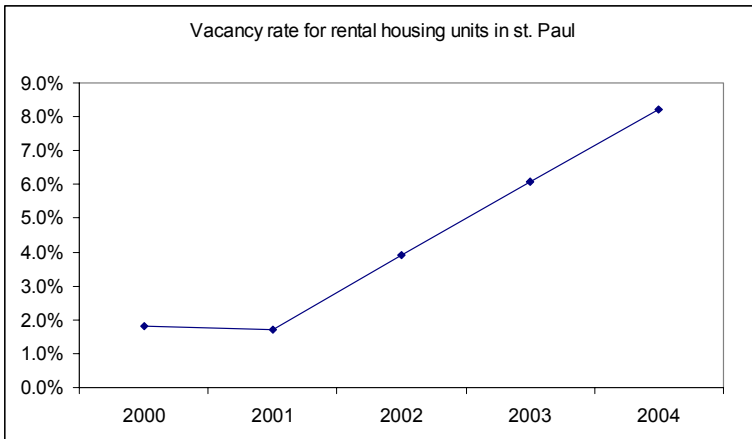
Student mobility has decreased somewhat in St. Paul over the last five years, although **student mobility is significantly higher in St. Paul schools compared to the statewide averages.** For the following chart, mid-year transfers are reported as a percentage of the total student enrollment as of October 1 of that school year, and include transfers into, out of, and within the district.



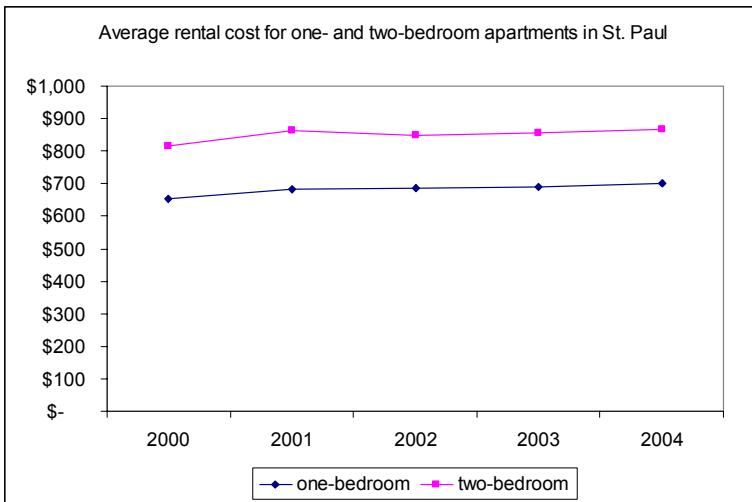
Wilder Research Center reported that **26,900 St. Paul low-income households are paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing, which is 55 percent of the low-income population.** The number and percent of households that pay more than 30 percent and more than 50 percent of their monthly income for housing costs has remained fairly stable from 1990 to 2000 (measured at the time of the Census).

		1990	2000
Paying more than 30%	Number	28,268	26,907
	Percent	54%	55%
Paying more than 50%	Number	13,343	12,466
	Percent	26%	26%

On the other hand, the rate of **homelessness has increased significantly over the last three years.** In 1997, the rate of homelessness in Ramsey County was 6.81 per 1000, in 2000 it was 6.27 per 1000, and in 2003 it was 8.19 per 1000.



The vacancy rate for rental housing units in St. Paul has increased significantly in the last five years from a low of 1.7 percent in June 2001 to 8.2 percent in June 2004.



The average rental cost for one- and two-bedroom apartments in St. Paul has increased approximately \$50 per month over the last five years. (Note: These figures are NOT adjusted for inflation.)

Increasing vacancy rates plus stable rents have created a rental housing market that is more favorable for renters than it was five years ago. However, low-income renters still face challenges in finding housing that is affordable. In addition, there is a significant shortage of housing for individuals and families with special needs.

Sources:

- Amherst H. Wilder Foundation strategic plan update, October 2004 (non-public document)
- Minnesota Department of Education

Additional Notes

1. NEAT has additional information about housing posted at www.stpaulneat.org/Housing and would like to see a "Life Cycle Housing" report for Saint Paul or Ramsey County.
2. Another issue of concern is that the State of Minnesota is defining mobility in the way that's more restrictive than what's required by NCLB. See www.parentsunitednetwork.org/7Jul2004
3. SPPS reports mobility data at datacenter.spps.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={B7D66D95-4FB5-4843-929B-FCC54DE46330}

Low Birthweight –

Low birthweight can lead to severe problems, ranging from mortality to learning problems. Child Trends summarizes the findings of research this way, “Infants born low-birthweight are at risk of long term disability and impaired development. Infants born under 2,500 grams are more likely than heavier infants to experience delayed motor and social development, children aged 4-17 who were born at low birthweight were more likely to be enrolled in special classes, to repeat a grade or to fail in school than children who were born at a normal birthweight.”

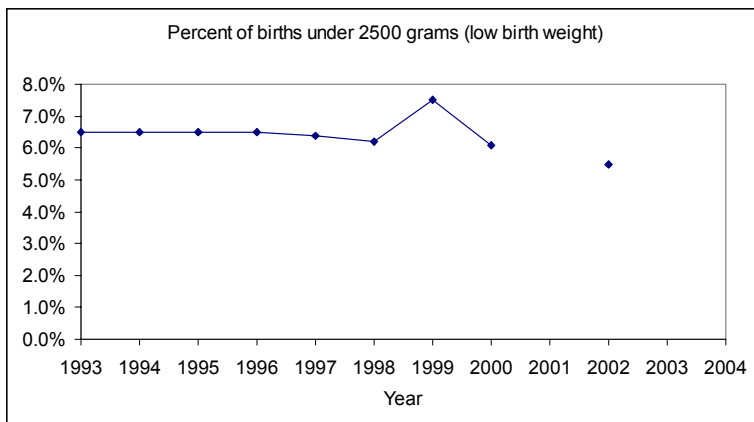
WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Percentage of Infants Born of Low Birthweight, by Race/Ethnicity

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

[Information provided by Wilder Research Center (highlights in bold)]

Babies born weighing less than 5 1/2 pounds are more likely to: have developmental problems, have less than normal growth, have handicapping physical problems, and die before their first birthday. **The percent of infants born in Ramsey County weighing less than 2500 grams has been stable from 1996 to 2000**, ranging from 6 to 8 percent. In 2002, the rate of low birth weigh in Ramsey County was 5.5 percent. This compares to the 1993 to 1997 combined rate of 6.5 percent.



Low birth weight rates vary significantly by race; African Americans and American Indians have the highest rates of low birth weight babies (around 10%). Hispanics have low birth weight rates ranging from 6 to 8 percent. Whites and Asians have somewhat lower rates of low birth weight babies (5% to 7%). These rates are significantly higher than the 2004 statewide goal of 3.5 percent or fewer low birth weight babies.

Sources:

- Ramsey County Department of Public Health at www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/
- Minnesota Department of Health at www.health.state.mn.us

Lead Poisoning –

The research shows lead levels cause “reductions in IQ and attention span, reading and learning disabilities and behavior problems.” Lead is a major, preventable pediatric environmental health risk. Children are particularly at risk from exposure to lead, with blood lead levels above 10 µg/dL considered elevated. Although lead is found throughout the environment, the major exposure pathway of public health concern is through deteriorated, lead-based paint. [Wilder Research Center, November 2004]

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Percentage of Children Under Age 6 with High Lead Levels Living in Housing Built Before 1946, by Ethnicity
- Percentage of Children Under Age 6 with High Lead Levels, by Poverty Status

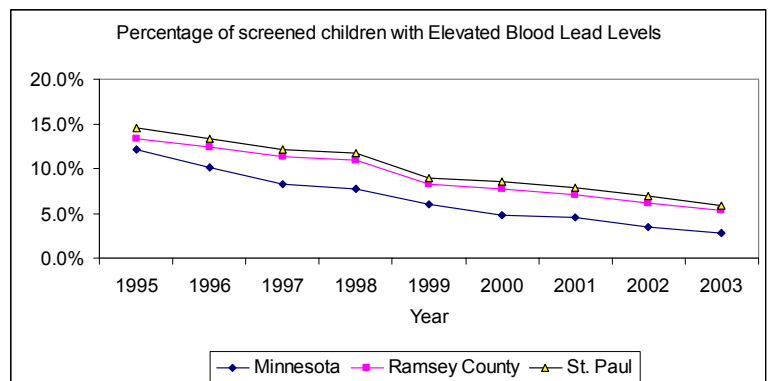
WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Information presented is a combination of gathered by NEAT and what was provided by Wilder Research Center. NEAT information posted at www.stpaulneat.org/Lead_Poisoning

Universal screening is recommended for children residing in Minneapolis and St. Paul and those recently arriving from other major metropolitan areas. Minnesota Blood Lead Surveillance Data, 2003

About a third of Somali and Laotian children, and over half of SE Asian refugee children tested by the Minnesota Department of Health in 1998 had lead poisoning. From www.unitedwaytwincities.org/documents/fullreportimmigrantsandhealth.pdf

Approximately 85 percent of the reports of elevated lead levels in the blood in Minnesota come from just two counties (Hennepin and Ramsey), indicating that in specific areas of the state lead poisoning continues to be a major public health problem. For this reason, the Minnesota screening guidelines recommend universal testing in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.



In addition, about 77 percent of the children in the Minnesota Blood Lead Surveillance database reside in urban areas. **In 2003, 5.9 percent of the children who were screened in Ramsey County were found to have Elevated Blood Lead Levels, compared to only 2.8 percent of all children screened in Minnesota.**

Finally, the MDH study showed that EBLLs, testing rates, and follow-up testing rates for MHCP children all varied by race/ethnicity. Lead poisoning rates were found to be higher for children of color compared to white children.

Sources:

- Minnesota Department of Health website: www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/lead/
- Personal communication with Erik Zabel, Minnesota Department of Health

Additional Notes

Despite all this effort to collect the data to identify at-risk populations, the state does not report lead incidence data by ethnicity, except for refugees. Given that a) a correlation has been established between student achievement and elevated blood levels; b) lead incidence and abatement have been established as a priority [above]; c) approximately 85 percent of the reports of elevated lead levels in the blood in Minnesota come from just two counties (Hennepin and Ramsey); c) 63% of Saint Paul students are from low-income families [connect.spps.org/Demographics]; and d) 73% of Saint Paul students are students of color [datacenter.spps.org/vertical/Sites/{D03903F8-E2BF-4077-AAF3-4003D3B6E051}/uploads/Race_Schools_FY04_3-23-2004.pdf], we wonder what the data would show if *ALL* Saint Paul children were tested. It begs the question, “We can require immunizations, why not testing for lead?”

Hunger and Nutrition

Parsing the Achievement Gap was surprisingly weak in reporting the research about Hunger and Nutrition so we went to one of their sources, “Out of Balance: An Understanding of How Schools Affect Society and How Society Affects Schools,” Spencer Foundation, January 2002, found at www.spencer.org/publications/conferences/traditions_of_scholarships/traditions_of_scholships.pdf

The research shows a correlation between vitamin and mineral supplements and test score gains, eating breakfast at school, weight deviation from the normal weight for children that age and gender, and iron-deficiency anemia.

WAYS TO MEASURE:

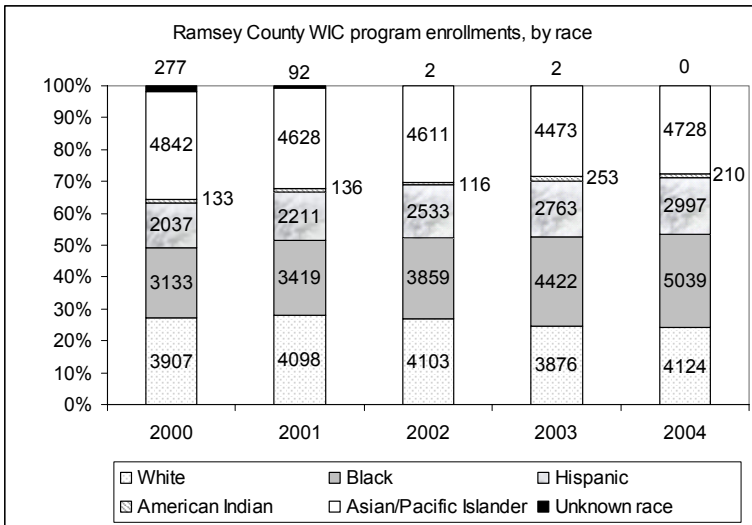
- Percentage of Households with Children Under Age 18 That Are Insecure in Food Supply and Hungry, by Race/Ethnicity and Income

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

[Information provided by Wilder Research Center (highlights in bold)]

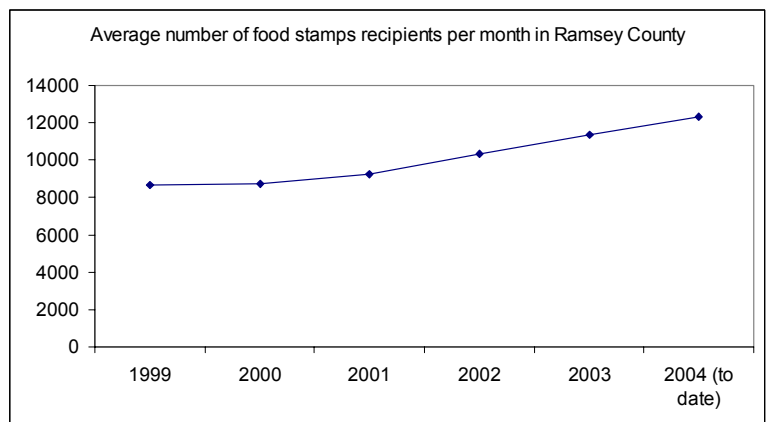
WIC, food stamps, MFIP, and MNCare enrollments –

Caution should be used when examining five-year trend data for these programs because welfare reform laws and other policy changes may have impacted case loads.

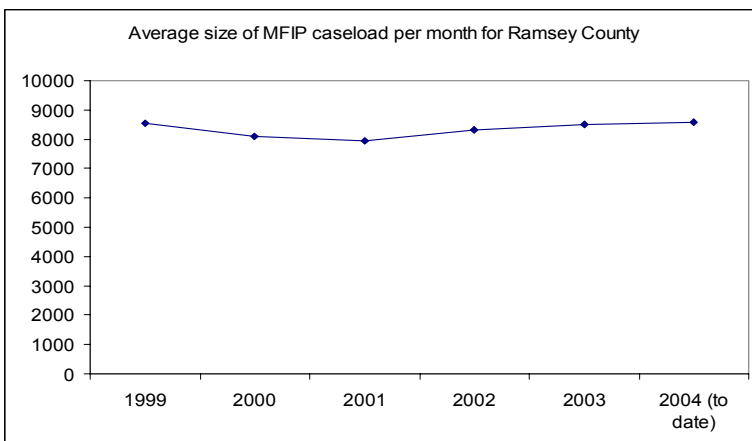


The number of WIC participants has increased from 2000 to 2004, with the largest increase from 2003 to 2004 (15,788 recipients to 17,099 recipients). Over the same time period, the percentage of recipients who are White and Asian decreased slightly and the percentage of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian recipients increased slightly. The Ramsey County WIC program director expects to see a significant increase in the percentage of WIC recipients who are Asian, due to the recent immigration of Hmong refugees to the St. Paul area.

The number of households receiving food stamps has increased significantly from 1999 to 2004. This table presents the average number of food stamps recipient households per month over the entire year.

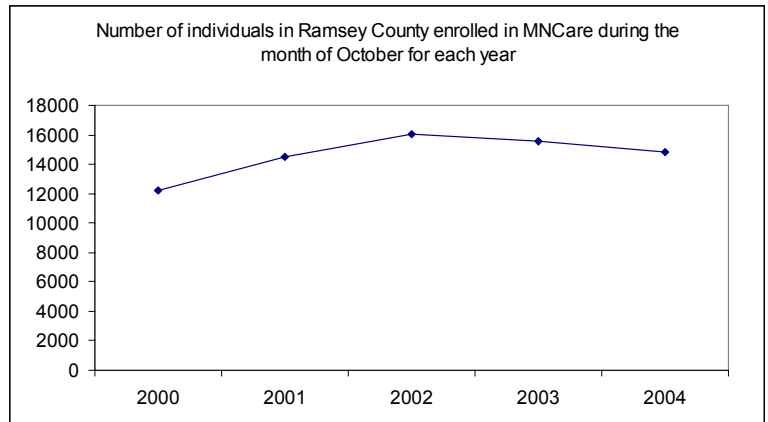


The MFIP caseload size has remained fairly stable over the last five years. This table presents the average number of MFIP recipient households per month over the entire year.



The proportion of Ramsey County MFIP recipients who are Black has increased from 1997 to 2002. In 1997, 33 percent of Ramsey County MFIP recipients were Black compared to 42 percent in 2002. The proportion of MFIP recipients who are Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian remained constant from 1997 to 2002 (24%, 5%, and 3%, respectively).

MNCare enrollments in Ramsey County have decreased over the last three years, from 16,053 in October 2002 to 14,816 in October 2004. This is after an increase in enrollments from 12,251 in October of 2000.



Sources:

- Minnesota Department of Health website: www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/lead/
- Personal communication with Mary Pieck, Minnesota Department of Health
- Personal communication with Laurie Hestness, Ramsey County Community Human Services Department, Office of Performance Measurement & Evaluation

Reading to Young Children –

A substantial body of research shows that reading to young children promotes student achievement. A good resource for parents is “A Child Becomes a Reader: Proven Ideas for Parents from Research--Birth to Preschool” available at <http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/earlychildhood.html>

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Percentage of Children Ages 3 to 5 (who had not yet entered Kindergarten) Who Were Read to Every Day in the Last Week, by Race/Ethnicity and Poverty

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Information gathered by NEAT (only briefly mentioned at the event)

Every year since 1999, SPPS has challenged all Saint Paul students, staff and citizens to read at least 25 books through [Saint Paul Reads](#). **In the 2003-04 school year, Saint Paul students read 1,688,756 books.** Saint Paul Reads operates in cooperation with the Saint Paul Public Libraries and Mayor Randy Kelly’s [Capital City Education Initiative](#). In addition, [Saint Paul Area Council of Churches](#) offers several programs promoting K-3 literacy and engaging the community in conversations about social justice.

Sources:

- www.saintpaulreads.org
- www.stpaul4schools.org
- www.spacc.org/index.asp?Type=B_PRGSRV&SEC={EB49991F-4C07-481C-A3B3-30CE29757664}

Television Watching

At the time *Parsing the Achievement Gap* was published, research on the correlation between television watching and student achievement was contradictory. The April 2004 issue of *Pediatrics* (a professional journal for pediatricians), reported the results of research showing a correlation between hours of television watched at ages 1 and 3, and attentional problems at age 7. pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/113/4/708

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children be exposed to no more than 1 or 2 hours of television a day. www.psych.org/public_info/media_violence.cfm

Further research is needed about the affects of both television watching and electronic gaming.

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Percentage of Fourth Graders Watching Six Hours or More of TV per Day, by Race/Ethnicity (All Schools)
- Percentage of Fourth Graders Watching Six Hours or More of TV per Day, by Parents' Highest Level of Education (Public Schools)

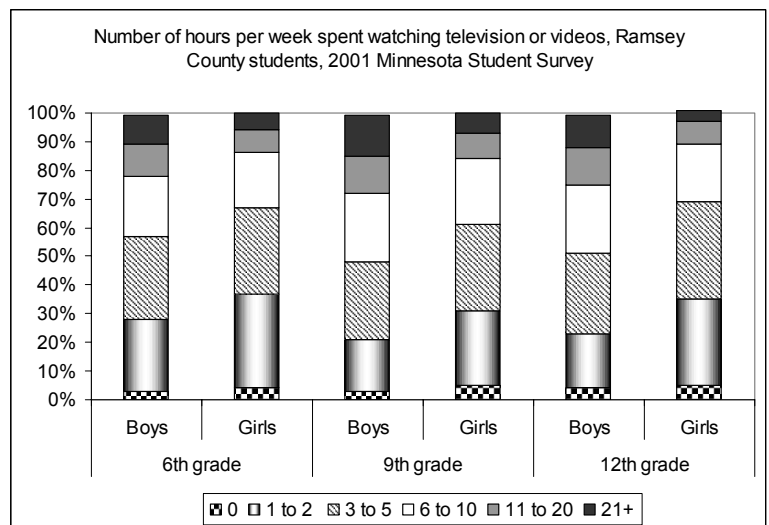
WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

[Information provided by Wilder Research Center (highlights in bold)]

The 2001 Minnesota Student Survey results indicate that 21 percent of 6th grade boys and 14 percent of 6th grade girls in Ramsey County watch more than 10 hours of television per week.

Sources: Minnesota Department of Education

Note: The 2001 Minnesota Student Survey Findings for Ramsey County can be found at www.mnschoolhealth.com/article/data/030521150302-435650/031001162510-835808/fmsstablesramsey20co.pdf



Parent Availability –

Parsing the Achievement Gap defines parent availability as two-parent households and reports research correlating the “parent-pupil ratio” to student achievement. A substantial body of brain research connects learning readiness to parental interactions with young children. For more information visit The Talaris Research Institute at www.talaris.org/synopsis.htm

WAYS TO MEASURE:

- Parent Availability by Race/Ethnicity
- Poverty and Family Structure

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS:

Information gathered by NEAT (only briefly mentioned at the event)

The CommunityDataWorks demographic profile of the city of Saint Paul based on the 2000 Census data reports:

- 2,710 Households with individuals under 18 years
- 2,510 Households with own children under 18 years
- 855 Female householder, no husband present with own children under 18 years, and
- 1460 Married-couple family with own children under 18 years

See www.communitydataworks.org/StPaul/data/combined_districts.pdf

The Minnesota Student Survey also provides student-reported information about Parent Availability. 2001 data is posted at www.mnschoolhealth.com/article/data/030521150302-435650/031001162510-835808/fmsstablesramsey20co.pdf

Additional Variables to Consider

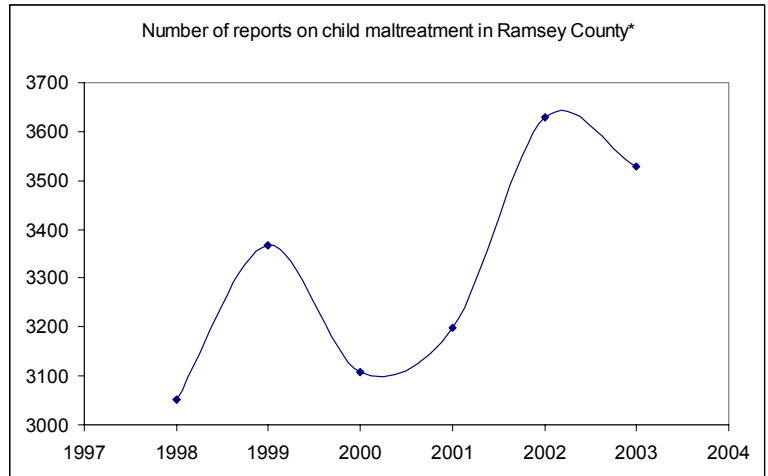
These variables were only briefly mentioned at the Achievement Gap event (or not mentioned at all), but are relevant to future conversations and action plans.

Additional Public Health/Environmental Health Issues - The incidence of Asthma among Saint Paul students and sources of environmental pollution and the correlation between student achievement and Asthma warrant further investigation.

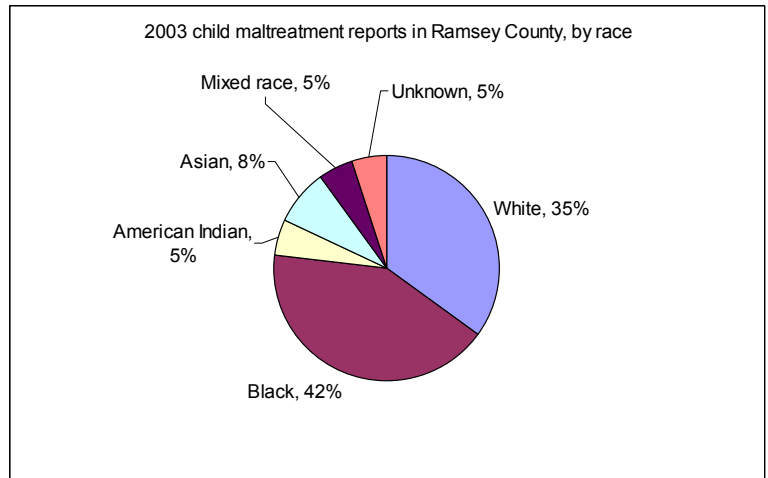
Child protection data –

[Information provided by Wilder Research Center (highlights in bold)]

Caution should be used when examining five-year trend data for child maltreatment because new programs such as Alternative Response may have impacted caseloads. **In 2003, children of color were significantly over-represented in the number of children receiving a child maltreatment assessment in Ramsey County.** Ten percent of the children represented here are Hispanic (of any race).



The number of child maltreatment reports increased by approximately 500 cases from 1998 to 2003. *It is very important to note that in 2000 Ramsey County began using Alternative Response, which is an alternative approach to the child protection system. Therefore, the numbers included from 1998 and 1999 include different cases than the numbers from 2000 and more recently.



Sources:

- Personal communication with Laurie Hestness, Ramsey County Community Human Services, Office of Performance Measurement & Evaluation [Wilder Research Center]

TIP data

Wilder Research Center was unable to find data on this program, but recommends contacting two people who may be able to provide data upon further request: Connie Nowacki (651-266-2388) and Kate Santleman (651-266-3125) from the Minnesota Department of Corrections, which administers the program.

Juvenile Justice data –

NEAT recently learned that sometimes kids are “referred” to the Juvenile Justice system because it’s the only way people (district/school staff) can ensure they receive the services they need. The role of the Juvenile Justice system (as opposed to family support/Health & Human Services) is worth exploring. The data in this report is really old (1999) but worth taking a look at. See Race and ethnicity of juveniles in Minnesota’s justice system at www.mnplan.state.mn.us/pdf/2001/race.pdf Posted at www.stpaulneat.org/Use_the_Data_Saint_Paul

Mental Health Issues –

The February 2004 Wilder Research Center report: Severely troubled children and youth: What everyone needs to know, provides a brief overview of major research about troubled children and youth, including definition of how the term "troubled" is used, what is known about causes and impacts of their troubles, and effective approaches for working with them.

An estimated 6,000 children and youth in Ramsey County have severe, long-term difficulties that make it very hard for them to function at home, at school, and in the community.

See www.wilder.org/research/reports/pdf/troubledchildren02-04.pdf
Posted at [www.stpaulneat.org/Use the Data Saint Paul](http://www.stpaulneat.org/Use_the_Data_Saint_Paul)

Kindergarten Readiness

Table 2. 2002-2003 Beginning Kindergarten Assessment
By Racial/Ethnic Group

State data shows

Source: Minnesota School Readiness Year Two Study: Fall 2003,
education.state.mn.us/content/065878.pdf
Posted at
[www.stpaulneat.org/Early Childhood](http://www.stpaulneat.org/Early_Childhood)

BKA	District Average	American Indian	African American	Asian American	Hispanic American	White American
Population	3327	138	1258	430	573	928
Literacy Mean Performance						
Rhyming	7	6	6	4	4	11
Picture Naming	25	27	26	20	14	31
Alliteration	5	4	4	4	3	8
Concepts of Print	3	3	3	2	2	4
Sound Recognition	4	2	3	3	1	8
Numeracy Percent Mastery						
Counts to 35*	30%	20%	29%	19%	10%	52%
Knows One-to-One Correspondence	82%	83%	81%	75%	65%	96%
Extends a Pattern*	77%	77%	72%	75%	65%	91%
Identifies Numbers (0-9)*	49%	47%	43%	47%	27%	70%
Orders Numbers*	45%	41%	36%	39%	28%	70%

* = yes or no item

Minneapolis data shows

Source: 2003 - Minneapolis Public Schools 2002-2003 Districtwide Assessment Results.
See doc.mpls.k12.mn.us/sites/3ab69bed-343f-4692-80cb-86c05ea9cf88/uploads/DAR_2003.pdf
Posted at www.stpaulneat.org/Resources12

Domain	Not Yet				In Process				Proficient			
	2002		2003		2002		2003		2002		2003	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Physical Development	77	4%	76	2%	629	34%	1,207	41%	1,143	62%	1,702	57%
Personal & Social Development	238	13%	266	9%	708	38%	1,317	44%	899	49%	1,407	47%
The Arts	181	10%	170	6%	779	42%	1,413	48%	885	48%	1,391	47%
Language												
Mathematical Thinking	247	13%	318	11%	816	44%	1,489	50%	785	42%	1,186	40%

[NOTE: The question was raised at the event about which tests were administered in these two studies; which test is used can make a significant difference in results.]

What does the Saint Paul data show?

According to the April 2004 report *Tackling the achievement gap head on*, from the Wilder Research Center, “Preschool screening can be critical for early identification of health and developmental needs that may interfere with learning. The earlier children are screened, the more time there is for them to receive help before entering school. **Unfortunately, in St. Paul only about half (52%) of the children are screened by age 4, and 14 percent are not screened until they enter kindergarten when it is mandatory.**” See www.wilder.org/research/reports.html?summary=1227 posted at www.stpaulneat.org/Use_the_Data_Saint_Paul

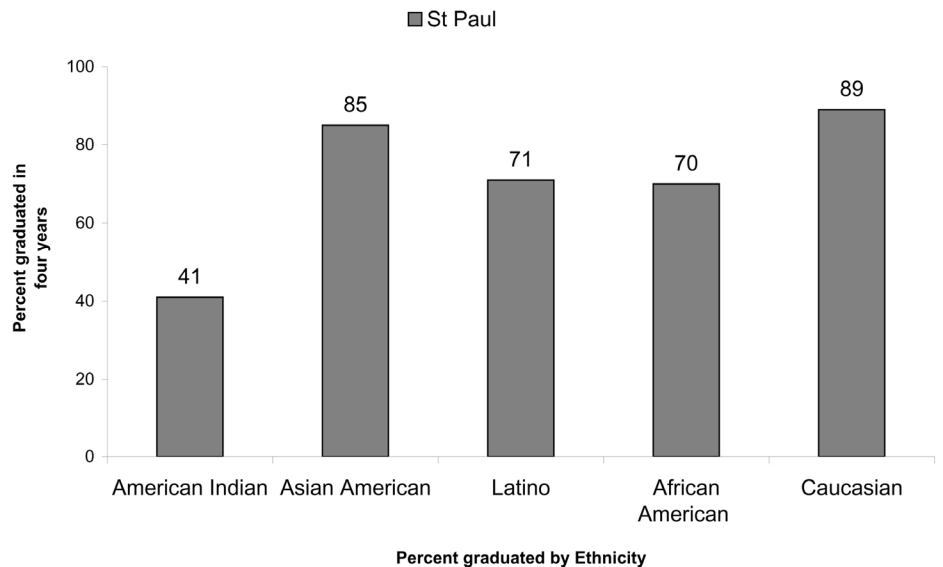
Note: Saint Paul Public Schools is currently working with the Minnesota Department of Education on a project related to this variable; specifics unknown.

Disaggregated Graduation Rates

Overall Four-Year Completion, Continuation and Dropout Rates were included in the District Achievement Summary provided by Tom Watkins, but they weren’t disaggregated by ethnicity. Additional graduation data through SPPS-REA includes:

See rea.spps.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={255ECF78-0D18-4A50-82DD-D0FD6BA084FD}

2002 Graduation Rates by Ethnicity for SPPS



Part 4. What can we do about it?

Carlos Mariani, Executive Director of Minnesota Minority Education Partnership and member of the Minnesota House of Representatives spoke to how we as parents need to help encourage all kids to achieve. He talked about how he encourages his own child to do the best he can, and spoke to the need to figure out how to institutionalize that.

Mariani also spoke to the need to have students at the core of all efforts, “Everything needs to be student-centered, not focused on the system, not focused on the parents, but focused on the students.” And he spoke to how the Minnesota Legislature should support public education and keep the needs of students at the core.

To learn more about the work of Carlos Mariani and the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, read the 2004 State of Students of Color report at www.mmep.net/vertical/Sites/{97D91A39-E591-4BD6-BC81-E367BAE549B5}/uploads/Students_of_Color_rpt_2004final.pdf

Part 5. Conclusion? Or a beginning?

This event was exhausting! Both in terms of the amount of data we looked at, as well as in terms of trying to figure out what the data was telling us. In the end, it felt like a beginning ... that we'd only scraped the surface of the issues. For that reason, it seems we need to move forward at several levels:

- **Individual Parents** – Need to have high expectations for children and sound strategies for supporting learning at home.

Resources:

- School Web sites
- Saint Paul Learns Resources for Parents at parenttools.spps.org and
- Saint Paul Learns Community Resources at communityservices.spps.org/index.asp?SEC={BB2C182C-E8E5-4B12-A033-FCF4648A7672}&Type=B_BASIC
- NEAT has started a “Learning at Home” page at www.stpaulneat.org/Home2
- Minnesota Humanities Commission Family Literacy Initiatives includes Reading with Dad Booklist at www.minnesotahumanities.org/Literacy/dadlist.htm; Bilingual Initiatives at www.minnesotahumanities.org/Literacy/bilingual.htm and Tips for Reading with Children (in multiple languages) at www.minnesotahumanities.org/Literacy/tips.htm
- Saint Paul Public Libraries Family Resources and Events at www.sppl.org
- The Talaris Research Institute at www.talaris.org/synopsis.htm

- **Parent Groups** –

Need to work to strengthen parent-teacher-school relationships and parent-school-community connections. More specifically, Parent Groups and Site Councils can develop site-level strategies around:

1. Strengthening parent-teacher-school relationships.

- Implement strategies to affirm, value and promote the important work parents do at home. (From birth! Many students have younger siblings.)
- Actively work to combat negative stereotypes about parents who aren't visibly present at school.
- Implement strategies to create more welcoming, parent-friendly school environments.
- Provide tips and tools parents can use to encourage learning at home, including work with staff to provide grade level/class curriculum connections to community resources. (A good starting point this is the Saint Paul Community Resources link noted above)
- Improve phone access, especially for those parents whose primary language is not English.
- Produce a school directory to support communication among children and families (elementary).
- Share Best Practices with the online discussion group NEAT is launching for parent groups. See www.stpaulneat.org/NEAT_E-List
- Combine school celebrations (concerts, plays) with strategies to support learning at home and invitations to become part of planning/leadership.

In addition, we invite and encourage parent groups and site councils to use this report as a starting point for finding ways to address the Achievement Gap at the school level.

2. Strengthening parent-school-community connections.

The City of Saint Paul is a national model for civic engagement. The city is divided into 17 neighborhoods represented by independent, nonprofit Community Councils led by volunteer boards. The Community Councils serve as neighborhood liaisons to the city council and various city departments, and are struggling with the same issues around how best to serve the diverse communities of Saint Paul. NEAT urges school parent groups to contact their Community Councils to talk about the community-based variables that impact student achievement and ways to collaborate to address them.

See www.ci.stpaul.mn.us/residents/districtcouncils

3. Keep the focus close to home.

Even though broadening efforts to include community-based issues seems like an expansion, keeping the focus on using the data, to identify needs, to develop strategies to address them will help keep the focus close to home. If you haven't done so already, ask your principal to present your school's achievement data and priority strategies for improving academic achievement. Ask yourselves, what you can do to support these efforts.

- **Community-wide –**

The issues raised at both events raise concerns at the broader, more systemic level. NEAT is in the process of reframing how it defines advocacy to include:

- Helping parents learn how to advocate for their children (parent-child)
- Helping parent groups learn how to advocate for their concerns at the school-level (in conversations with site councils and school administration)
- Supporting the efforts of parent groups and site councils taking their concerns to the district
- Helping parent groups take their concerns to the community, whether it be at the local level (neighborhoods, city, county) or broader levels (state, federal)

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NEAT is pleased to report that Homecroft Elementary used the framework provided in the September 2004 *Embracing Diversity* report to replicate the conversation at the school level. "We used the report to begin a dialogue with our site council about some of the specific concerns that are echoed at our school," said Principal Choua Lee. "We're looking at several things from the report, as well as some of our own areas of concern."

"We knew this was very important for our school, but the NEAT report confirmed for us that these are challenges all over the city, and that we need to do something about them."

Choua Lee, Principal
Homecroft Elementary

Homecroft gave a copy of the report to everyone at the meeting, divided into two groups and looked specifically at the group notes. "We only used the actual parent input sheets because that's where the meat is of what the parents said at the NEAT forum." The format of the report allowed the two groups to use the three primary questions to guide their discussions. The groups then came back together and used the three questions to guide their whole group conversation. "We asked the groups to report back what they read about and what resonated with them," said Lee. "We learned that the concerns of our site council members are very consistent with what was found at the NEAT forum. Transportation is a huge piece and site council members want to pursue more workshops for families. We want to break down the barriers so that parents can participate."

In short, NEAT Advocacy is about helping parents and parent groups learn how to advocate for children at the places where the decisions are being made (school district, city, county, state, federal levels).

If we're going to pull together as a community to close the Achievement Gap, this report is an important first step in deciding what issues need to be addressed. The challenge is to move from inquiry (learning about the issues) to action (doing something about them).

Call to Action – Systemic Issues

1. School Discipline-Community Supports. Of the issues defined at the event, one of the most challenging for parents is the relationship between school discipline, Health & Human Services and Juvenile Justice. Parents are reporting concerns about how the district's zero-tolerance policy has been overextended and overused, especially among students of color. A solid Call to Action would involve a serious investigation into school-based discipline with recommendations for other strategies for intervention. The social work field offers useful models for connecting students to family supports.
2. Cultural Complexities. At the September 2004 Embracing Diversity event, NEAT heard a clear message from the parents of our cultural communities that we need to work on issues related to cultural sensitivity (communication styles), cultural awareness (increase awareness of cultural differences) and inclusion. Saint Paul parents from all communities want strong parent-school connections, and they want their children to see themselves in the curriculum and diversity of staff.

The NEAT Cultural Communities Collaborative will be working on these issues and welcomes any/all who want to add their energy. See www.stpaulneat.org/Diversity

What is NEAT's Role in all of this?

NEAT was formed in 1999 as an effort to support parent groups operating within the schools. This was at the time site councils were forming, and the concern was that if the 80/20 rule applies where 20% of the people do 80% of the work, siphoning active parents off struggling parent groups would cripple them. This concern, raised by Margo Fox, a former member of the Saint Paul Board of Education, has proven to be true.

Many parent groups throughout the Saint Paul schools have disbanded in the past five years—because they lacked the energy and leadership to carry on, and because the purposes and functions of parent groups is unclear in the context of site councils. To some, the question was, “Why have a parent group when we have site councils doing all the work? Isn't that the core of having a PTA – a parent-teacher association?”

The ongoing concern is that parent groups serve core functions beyond the role of site councils. Parent groups are the only separate place and space where the parent voice is at the core. Furthermore, parent groups perform important community-building functions –coordinating and promoting school events and celebrations, recruiting volunteers and fundraising.

In essence, NEAT is working to put into place the same infrastructure at the citywide level –a separate place and space where the parent voice matters. Our genuine hope is that parent groups and site councils will follow

the lead of Homecroft and use these reports to engaging parents in substantive efforts to address the barriers to student achievement within the schools, and plug into NEAT to work on the systemic issues at a broader level.

What we learned by undertaking this effort is that we can't hold schools accountable for all of society's ills. If we're going to make a genuine effort to close the Achievement Gap, we need to broaden the scope of accountability to include the public agencies responsible for overseeing efforts correlated to student achievement. This includes the Ramsey County Departments of Health and Human Services, Metropolitan Council¹ (the entity responsible for coordinating regional public policy on issues related to housing, transportation, and economic development (jobs)), and the City of Saint Paul (the entity responsible for coordinating local efforts).

Admittedly, these are high level issues and we're just parents, but as parents we have the advantage of having our feet planted solidly in both worlds – in our schools and in our community.

We are the citizens, taxpayers, employees and business owners of Saint Paul.

See NEAT

See the Connections

www.stpaulneat.org

¹ A pivotal starting point for those interested in the connection to local and regional policy issues is the August 2002 briefing paper, "*Racism and Metropolitan Dynamics: The Civil Rights Challenge of the 21st Century*," University of Minnesota Institute on Race & Poverty at www.irpumn.org/uls/resources/projects/racismandmetroynamics.pdf